

AP AMERICAN GOVERNMENT KEY TERMS  
GOVERNMENT INSTITUTIONS  
**CONGRESS**

acquit	To find someone accused of a crime as not guilty.
adjourn	To suspend a session of Congress.
apportionment	The process of allotting congressional seats to each state following the decennial (every 10 years) census according to their proportion of the population.
appropriate	To assign to a particular use.
at-large election	The election of an officeholder by the voters of an entire governmental unit (like a country) rather than by the voters of a subdivision.
bankruptcy	The legal proceeding by which a bankrupt person's assets are distributed among those to whom he or she owes debts.
bicameral legislature	A legislature divided into two houses (or chambers).
bill	A proposed law.
caucus	An association of Congress members created to advance a political ideology or a regional, ethnic, or economic interest. ( <i>*Note this term is also used differently when referring to Presidential nominations</i> )
censure	To issue a formal condemnation.
closed rule	An order from the House Rules Committee that sets a time limit on debate; forbids a bill from being amended on the floor.
cloture (rule 22)	Mechanism requiring sixty senators to vote to cut off debate (Also called rule 22) (This is how they stop filibusters)
commerce power	An exclusive power of Congress to regulate interstate and foreign trade.
committee chairperson ( or chairmen or chair)	A member of who heads a standing committee in a legislative body.
Committee of the Whole	A committee that consists of an entire legislative body; used for a procedure in which a legislative body expedites its business by resolving itself into a committee of itself.

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concurrent resolution	A statement of position used by the House and Senate acting jointly; it does not have the force of law and does not require a President's signature.
congressional review	A process where Congress can nullify agency regulations by a joint resolution of legislative disapproval.
conference committee	Special joint committee created to iron out differences between Senate and House versions of a specific piece of legislation.
conservative coalition	An alliance between Republican and conservative Democrats.
constituency	The people and interests that an elected official represents.
continuous body	A government unit (like the U.S. Senate) whose seats are never all up for election at the same time.
copyright	The exclusive, legal right of a person to reproduce, publish, and sell his or her own literary, musical, or artistic creations.
delegate (representative view)	Roles played by elected representatives who vote the way their constituents would want them to, regardless of their own opinions.
direct tax	A tax that must be paid by the person on whom it is levied.
discharge petition	Petition that gives a majority of the House of Representatives the authority to bring an issue to the floor in the face of committee inaction.
divided government	The political condition in which different political parties control the White House and Congress ( at least one house).
division vote	A congressional voting procedure in which members stand and are counted.
doctrine	A principle or fundamental policy.
double-tracking	A procedure to keep the Senate going during a filibuster in which the disputed bill is shelved temporarily so that the Senate can get on with other business.
earmark	Funds in appropriations bills that provide dollars for particular projects within a state or congressional district.
eminent domain	The power of a government to take private property for public use.

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engross	To print a bill in its final form.
expressed powers	Those powers written out in the constitution. <i>(Usually referred to one type of power delegated to the National government)</i>
filibuster	A formal way of halting action on a bill by means of long speeches or unlimited debate in the Senate.
floor leader	Members of the House and Senate picked by their parties to carry out party decisions and steer legislative action to meet party goals.
franking privilege	A benefit allowing members of Congress to mail letters and other materials postage-free.
gerrymander	When redrawing district lines after the census, they draw them to give an advantage to the political party that controls the State's legislature.
hold	A tactic by which a senator asks to be informed before a particular bill is brought to the floor. This allows the senator to stop the bill from coming to the floor until the hold is removed.
impeachment	The first step of the constitutional process for removing government officials from office. It takes place in the House of Representatives.
implied powers	The powers suggested by the expressed powers but are not written out; Powers seen as "necessary and proper" to carry out expressed powers.
incumbency	The fact that being in office helps a person stay in office because of a variety of benefits that go with the position.
indirect tax	A tax levied on one party but passed on to another for payment.
inherent powers	Powers the Constitution is presumed to have delegated the national government because it is the government of a sovereign state within the world community.
joint committee	Committee that includes members from both houses of Congress to conduct investigations or special studies.
joint resolution	A proposal for action that has the force of law when passed (and approved by the president); usually deals with special circumstances or temporary matters.
legal tender	Any kind of money that a creditor must, by law, accept in payment for debts.

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liberal constructionist	One who argues a broad interpretation of the provisions of the Constitution, particularly those granting powers to the Federal Government.
logrolling	Vote trading, voting to support a colleague's bill in return for a promise of future support.
majority leader	The elected leader of the party controlling the most seats in the House of Representatives or the Senate (most powerful position in the Senate, and second most powerful in the House)
majority party	The political party in each house of Congress with the most members.
marginal district	Political districts in which candidates elected to the House of Representatives win in close elections, typically by less than 55 percent of the vote.
markup	A process in which committee members offer changes to a bill before it goes to the floor in either house for a vote.
minority leader	The elected leader of the party with the second highest number of elected representatives in the House of Representatives or the Senate.
minority party	The political party in each house of Congress with the second most members.
multiple referral	A congressional process whereby a bill may be referred to several important committees.
naturalization	The legal process by which citizens of one country become citizens of another.
Necessary and Proper Clause	A constitutional clause that gives Congress the power to make all laws "necessary and proper" for executing its powers (implied powers) <i>This clause is also known as the elastic clause.</i>
off-year election	Congressional election that occurs between presidential election years.
open rule	An order from the House Rules Committee that permits a bill to be amended on the floor.
oversight	Congressional review of the activities of an agency, department, or office.

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patent	A license issued to an inventor granting the exclusive right to manufacture, use, or sell his or her invention for a limited period of time.
partisan vote (organizational view)	Roles played by elected representatives who vote the way their political party wants them to vote. ( <i>Organizational view includes this and also voting due to congressional colleagues, regardless of party</i> ).
party caucus (party conference)	A formal gathering of all party members (takes place in one of the houses of congress)
party polarization	A vote in which a majority of Democratic legislators oppose a majority of Republican legislators.
perjury	The act of lying under oath.
pocket veto	If Congress adjourns during the 10 days the president has to consider a bill (passed by both houses of Congress), the bill is considered vetoed without presidential action.
politico	Role played by elected representatives who act as trustees or as delegates, depending on the issue.
pork (pork-barrel legislation)	Legislation that allows representatives to bring home the bacon to their districts in the form of public works program, military bases, or other programs designed to benefit their districts directly.
president of the Senate	The Vice president. Votes only if there is a tie in the Senate.
president pro tempore	The official chair of the Senate; usually the most senior member of the majority party.
private bill	A legislative bill that deals only with specific, private, personal or local matters.
prorogue	To adjourn a legislative session.
public bill	A legislative bill that deals with matters of general concern.
quorum	The least number of members who must be present for a legislative body to conduct business. ( <i>Sometimes referred to as majority</i> )
quorum call	A roll call in either house to see whether the minimum number of representatives required to conduct business is present.
reapportion	To redistribute the seats in a legislative body.

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redistricting	The redrawing of congressional districts to reflect increases or decreases in seats allotted to the states, as well as population shifts within a state.
resolution	A measure relating to the business of either house, or expressing an opinion, does not the force of law, and does not require the President's signature.
restrictive rule	An order from the House Rules Committee that permits certain kinds of amendments but not others to be made into a bill on the floor.
rider	An unpopular provision added to an important bill certain to pass so that it will "ride" through the legislative process.
roll-call vote	A congressional voting procedure that consists of members answering "yea" or "nay" to their names.
rules committee	A committee in the House of Representatives that is in charge of determining what rule other bills will come to the floor.
safe district	Districts in which incumbents win by margins of 55 percent or more.
select (or special) committee	Temporary committee appointed for specific purpose, such as conducting a special investigation or study.
senatorial courtesy	A process by which presidents, when selecting district court judges, defer to the senator in whose state the vacancy occurs.
seniority	Time of continuous service on a committee.
sequential referral	A congressional process by which a Speaker may send a bill to a second committee after the first is finished acting.
session	A period of time during which, each year, Congress assembles and conducts business.
simple resolution	An expression of opinion either in the House or Senate to settle procedural matters in either body.
single member district	Electoral district from which one person is chosen by the voters for each elected office.
Speaker of the House	Most powerful person in the House of Representatives. They are elected at the beginning of each new Congress by the entire House; traditionally is a member of the majority party.

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special session	A period when the body convenes outside of the normal legislative session.
standing committee	Committee to which proposed bills are referred; permanent as in it continues from one congress to the next.
strict constructionist	One who argues a narrow interpretation of the Constitution's provisions, in particular those granting power to the Federal Government.
subcommittee	A committee composed of some members of a larger committee, board, or other body and reporting to it.
subpoena	An order for a person to appear and to produce documents or other requested materials.
tax	A charge levied by government on persons or property to meet public needs.
teller vote	A congressional voting procedure in which members pass between two tellers, the "yeas" first and the "nays" second.
term (congressional term)	Two year period of time which Congress meets.
trustee (attitudinal view)	Role played by elected representatives who listen to constituents' opinions and then use their best judgement to make final decisions.
unified government	The same party of controls the White House and both houses of Congress.
veto	Formal constitutional authority of the president to reject bills passed by both houses of congress. Congress can override veto with 2/3's vote of both houses.
voice vote	A congressional voting procedure in which members shout "yea" in approval or "nay" in disapproval, permitting members to vote quickly or anonymously on bills.
War Powers Act	Passed by Congress in 1973; the president is limited in the deployment of troops overseas to a sixty day period in peacetime (which can be extended by 30 days to permit withdrawal) unless Congress explicitly gives its approval for a longer period.
whip	Key member who keeps close contact with all members of his or her party and takes nose counts on key votes, prepares summaries of bills, and in general acts as communications link within a party.